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THE ETHICS OF SOLOMON IBN GEBIROL.

WITH Solomon Ibn Gebirol begins the series of those celebrated Spanish Jewish poets, who, in their genius and their works recall the glorious fame of two of Israel's crowned representatives in the golden age of the nation. As poets and authors of liturgical poetry they appear to have inherited the harp of David, the holy singer, while as thinkers and philosophers they possessed the wisdom of Solomon, and united them both within themselves.

Solomon Ibn Gebirol was born in Malaga in the year 1021—1022,¹ was brought up in Saragossa, and lived afterwards in Cordova.² Whilst yet young his fame as a poet spread far beyond the borders of his country, so that from Egypt and Babylon a request was sent to him to compose an elegy upon the death of the Gaon Haya (1038). The treasury of secular and religious song that he left behind him after his death, which took place in Valencia after the

¹ An acrostic, quoted in Dukes' *Ehrensäulen*, p. 19, runs as follows :—
אני שלמה הקטן ברבי יהודה מלקי חזק ; Zunz (*Literaturgesch. der Synagog. Poesie*, p. 189, note 2), gives the following : אני שלמה קטן ברבי יהודה ;
אבן גבירול מאלקי חזק ואמן לבבכם וכו' ; cp. Abraham Ibn Ezra, in his Introduction to *Mozna'im*. For the date see Senior Sachs, in his uncompleted work, *רב שלמה בן גבירול*, p. 38.

² Moses Ibn Ezra, in Munk's *Mélanges de philosophie juive et arabe*, pp. 263. 515.

year 1069,¹ perhaps in 1070, had already become so famous as to assure for him an immortal memorial for all time. Not only were his liturgical compositions very favourably received by his co-religionists in Spain, North Africa, the Provence and Italy, but a few were also adopted into the German and Polish ritual, and thus even in remote countries his name was not altogether forgotten. It was, however, reserved for modern times to pay proper homage to the importance of Solomon Ibn Gebirol, and to reinstate this man, whose many-sided worth was unknown, in his full rights. A number of diligent editors and celebrated scholars, such as Leopold Dukes, S. D. Luzzatto, Michael Sachs, H. Edelmann, Abraham Geiger, Leopold Zunz, Senior Sachs, and others, have paid particular attention and study to his poetry, and thus also were the means of bringing to light his grammatical poem, *Anak*.² It was, however, left to Solomon Munk to reveal in Ibn Gebirol, the famous philosopher, who, under the distorted name of Avicebron or Avicebrol, was highly esteemed by the renowned Christian scholastics, Albertus Magnus and Thomas d'Aquinas, and whose works were subjected to a detailed refutation.³ Munk also edited the abridged Hebrew version by Shemtob Ibn Falaquera of the *Fountain of Life*, which was written in Arabic, and published it as a Hebrew appendix ⁴

¹ This is certain from the fact that the piece called שְׁנוּתֵינוּ סִפּו was composed in 1069, as Munk, *Mélanges*, p. 156, has remarked. The doubts, raised by Dr. Neubauer in Grätz' *Monatsschrift*, 1887, p. 498, against this statement, open up a very important question, which has little to do with our subject here. Cf. also Abraham Zacuto, *Juchasin*, ed. London, 1857, p. 217.

² The verses of this incomplete poem are often quoted from the preface of Solomon Parchon to his מַחְבֶּרֶת הָעֵרוּךְ (ed. Stern, Pressburg, 1844, p. 23 sqq.), as in Dukes' *Ehrensäulen*, p. 101, and his collection of שִׁירֵי שְׁלֹמֹה ii., p. 56; they were at length edited by Egers in the *Jubelschrift für Dr. Zunz*, Berlin, 1884, Hebrew portion, p. 192 sqq.

³ V. *Literaturblatt des Orients*, 1846, No. 46.

⁴ Under the title of לִיקוּטִים מִן סֵפֶר מִקּוֹר חַיִּים לִר' שְׁלֹמֹה ז"ל בֶּן גִּבְיֹרֹל, Paris, 1857.

to his book—*Mélanges de Philosophie juive et arabe* (Paris, 1857-9)—which was mainly devoted to Ibn Gebirol. In this way he made students acquainted with the metaphysics or theology of the celebrated Spaniard as far as the means he had to hand allowed; subsequently several other points were elucidated and rectified by others.¹ Nevertheless, there is still lacking a special and complete exposition of the Ethics of Solomon Ibn Gebirol, although his writings upon this subject are well known, and have never been entirely lost sight of. This topic the more deserves our fullest attention, because Gebirol is the oldest of the Jewish philosophers of Spain, and was a man whom, as an inspired poet and the interpreter of the most exalted religious feeling, we rightly admire and love.

In order to be able to give an account of the characteristics of his ethics, let us cast a brief glance over his inward nature, as it is so clearly and truthfully displayed in his poems.

Being a man of extraordinary and versatile talents, at once a poet and a philosopher, a grammarian and an exegetist, Solomon Ibn Gebirol obtained a wide-spread fame, and suffered equally from the flattering recognition of his friends, as from the embittering hostility of his opponents. His was a genius full of fire and animation, with strong creative powers. For his admirers and friends he felt an enthusiastic regard, whilst, on the other hand, he was fully conscious of his own importance, and expressed himself to that effect as frankly as his nature was frank; and thus, especially in his youth, he could not avoid conveying an impression of overbearing haughtiness and self-esteem. This aspect of his character appears to have estranged the hearts of his sincerest friends. Two prominent patrons of his are especially to be noted: Jekutiel ben Hassan in

¹ Seyerlen, in Baur and Zeller's *Theolog. Jahrbücher*, xv., p. 486 sqq. and xvi.; M. Joel, *Ibn Gebirol's Bedeutung für die Geschichte der Philosophie*, in his *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, Breslau, 1876; J. Guttmann, *Die Philosophie des Salomo Ibn Gabirol*, Göttingen, 1889; D. Kaufmann, *Geschichte der Attributenlehre*, Gotha, 1877, pp. 95—115.

Saragossa, and Samuel Hannagid Ibn Nagdela in Granada. To both of these he dedicated some powerful and excellent poems,¹ but he afterwards directed against the last-named and others verses bitterly complaining of their supposed coolness towards him.² His own fiery and impulsive nature was unable to reconcile the inroad of a colder feeling into the hearts of his friends with any truthfulness and sincerity. The inexplicable reserve of his well wishers and patrons cut him to the heart, and evoked his bitter reproaches. In all this we see sufficient justification for his constant ill-humour, but other and deeper causes must primarily have caused it. Left an orphan and without brothers in his boyhood,³ engaged, perhaps, in a long struggle with poverty and distress,⁴ he very early acquired a disposition too much inclined to gloomy seriousness. This tendency was strengthened by his profound studies and occupations, seeing that on their account he had to abandon the gaiety and enjoyments characteristic of youth. Thus, in his first years of manhood, when in 1045, at Saragossa, he composed his ethical masterpiece, *The Ennoblement of the Character*⁵ (תקון מדות הנפש), he complains of physical weakness, persecution and discontent.⁶

In spite of all this, Ibn Gebirol still felt within himself the power of passing beyond the narrow limit of his own circumstances, when guided by the hand of science, to discover and to maintain a free and unhampered outlook upon the moral life and its duties. His seriousness rendered him particularly fitted to grasp thoroughly the facts of the

¹ Dukes, שירי שלמה, Nos. 8. 14. 15. 16 for Jekutiel, No. 17 at his death; Nos. 26. 27. 28 for Samuel Hannagid.

² *Ibid.*, Nos. 4. 49. 50 et cetera.

³ Senior Sachs, התחייה ii., 22.

⁴ Dukes, שירי שלמה, p. 3, the end of the poem, and Note 8; S. Sachs *ib.* p. 28, n. 1.

⁵ Translated from the Arabic into Hebrew by Judah Ibn Tibbon for Asher b. Meshullam of Lünel.

⁶ *Tikkun midd. hannef.* ed. Riva di Trento, Preface, p. 5a, lines 6, 7.

human intellect and will, and to elicit the rules according to which the character and actions of man must be ethically assessed. The occasional outbursts of violence or bitterness, of despondency or mistrust, that occur in his poems, originated only in the weakness of an easily excited, but not ignoble nature. His character remained pure, free from malice and falsehood, unswervingly directed to all that was best and noblest.

Ibn Gebirol, however, did not wish that the ethics he taught should be altogether regarded as the result of his own thoughts and sentiments. On the contrary, he liked to connect his own teaching with the utterances of older authorities on the same subject, and clearly strove to enliven and adorn his work by the aid of a rich store of ancient proverbs, appropriate stories, and Biblical confirmation. This method was very much in accord with the prevailing taste of the times. Collections of wise sayings, rules of wisdom, narratives of remarkable events, were very popular and largely read. The Arabic collection of the maxims of Greek and later sages that was made by Honein ben Isaac, a Christian writer (809—873), was very popular in Jewish circles, and, later on, Judah Alcharisi felt inspired to render it accessible also to the Jews outside Spain by a Hebrew translation, under the title of *מִסְרֵי הַפִּילוֹסוֹפִים*¹ Ibn Gebirol also compiled a work comprised of similar sayings, and called it *The Choice of Pearls* *מִבְחַר הַפִּנְיִים*.² Thus, in his ethical work, he acted precisely

¹ Printed in Riva di Trento, 1562, and Luneville, 1807, together with the pseudo-Aristotelian *Book of the Apple* (*סֵפֶר הַתְּפוּחַ*) upon Immortality, and the *Tikkun Mid. hannefesh* of Ibn Gebirol, under the title of *נִוְרֵן נָכוֹן*. Apart from these other works, *Tikkun Mid. hannef.* also appeared in Constantinople, 1550, together with Bachja's *חֻבּוֹת הַלְּבָבוֹת*, and by itself in Wilna, 1845, and in Lyck, 1859.

² Also written in Arabic, and rendered into Hebrew by Judah Ibn Tibbon. On account of its title the collection was wrongly ascribed to Jedajah Penini of Beziers. It has been printed more than twenty times, first with a commentary by Simson Munay, in Constantinople, 1484. Recently, the

according to the fashion of the age in that he nearly always attached some suitable proverbs to the discussions of his introduction and to each separate chapter.

In passing, Ibn Gebirol gives the sources of the doctrines quoted by him, and the authors of the cited sayings. Sometimes he does this by a general indication, and at others by expressly naming his authority.¹

Such general indications are the sages,² the ancient ones,³ our sages,⁴ the philosophers,⁵ one of the kings.⁶

The following are definitely named in his chief ethical work:—Socrates,⁷ “the god-like,” Plato,⁸ Aristotle,⁹ Galen,¹⁰ Ptolemy,¹¹ Lokman,¹² the moral sayings of Origen,¹³ the

book appeared in London, 1851, ed. Filipowski, and afterwards in an elegant form, with an English translation and Notes, ed. Ascher, London, 1859.

¹ In the following foot-notes T. refers to the ethical work, *חקון מדות הנפש*, ed. Riva; P. to *The Choice of Pearls* (*מבחר הפנינים*); M. to the *מוסרי הפילוסופים*, ed. Riva; and L. to the *Fountain of Life* (*מקור חיים*).

² *החכמים* T., I. 2; *קצת מן החכמים* T., I. 2; III. 2, cp. P., IX. 7; *החכמים* T., I. 3; *החכם* I. 3; II. 1, three times; IV. 2, three times; *חכם אחד* I. 2, twice; *אחד מן הערב*, i.e. an Arab poet, I. 3.

³ *הקדמונים* T., I. 1.

⁴ *חכמינו* T., p. 7a.

⁵ *הפילוסופים* T., I. 3; *קצת הפילוסופים* T., p. 7a; *מקצת הפילוסופים*, middle of p. 4a; I. 3; V. 3; *הפילוסוף* p. 6b (where not Plato, as is observed on the margin, but Aristotle is meant; see my *Ethik des Maimonides*, Breslau, 1876, p. 36, Note 3); III. 1.

⁶ T., I. 2; according to Dukes, Salomo Ibn Gebirol, p. 114, Note 3, the Caliph Omar is meant.

⁷ T., I. 1, twice; II. 2; III. 1; III. 2, p. 13b (cp. P., VI. 1, and M., II. 1, p. 7b, line 32), and p. 14a, at the top (cp. M., II. 1, p. 7a, line 8).

⁸ T., II. 4 (cp. M., II. 2; P., 53, 2). The saying here quoted is, however, ascribed by Plutarch, in his work, *How one may derive benefit from his Enemies*, to Diogenes (Dukes, ib. p. 71).

⁹ T., I. 1; I. 3 (cp. P., 3, 10).

¹⁰ T., III. 1; III. 2 (cp. M., II. 9); IV. 1, cited from the work *ספר מדות הנפש*, which also, according to another saying, is named in M., II. 10.

¹¹ T., III. 2 (cp. M., II. 11); IV. 1.

¹² T., I. 2 (cp. M., II. 12).

¹³ *מוסרי ארגינאס* III. 1.

philosopher Gumhur,¹ the book of Kuti,² Saadiah,³ King Alexander the Great of Macedon,⁴ and King Ardshir Babekan,⁵ the founder of the Neo-Persian dynasty, in the year 226.

The most numerous and important, however, of these quotations—those which Ibn Gebirol regarded as the real basis of his ethical system—are taken from Holy Writ. These passages from the Bible are introduced mostly without comment, but, in a few places, an explanation of greater or less length is added,⁶ affording us acceptable specimens of his exegetical powers. These stray instances are the more valuable as his commentaries to the Bible have not come down to us. Sometimes, indeed, his desire to find support for certain doctrines unconsciously leads him astray from the simple interpretation of a verse, and his philosophy impairs his exegesis.

In treating of his ethical views, we will separate "general ethics," which deals with ethical principles, *i.e.*, with the object and conditions of virtue, and with the goal of a moral life, from "concrete ethics," which treats of the particular circumstances, phenomena, and results of moral conduct.

¹ נמהר I. 2 (according to Dukes, *ib.* p. 115, Grand Vizier of King Nushirvan).

² According to Steinschneider (*Jewish Literature*, p. 101), this is the book of Chefez Alkuti, spoken of by Moses ben Ezra under the name of אלקוטי, as the author of a free rendering of the Psalms in Arabic verse; T., I. 2; II. 2. 3, twice; IV. 1. 4; V. 1. 3.

³ T., III. 4, from Saadiah's *Emunot*, V. 1, p. 59a, line 9, and V. 3, p. 60b, ed. Berlin. There are other things borrowed from Saadiah that can be noticed; *e.g.* T., p. 4a, line 2, from *Emun.* X. 3, p. 95a, line 12; T., I. 1, p. 9b, second half, and II. 1, also more or less follow Saadiah.

⁴ T., III. 2, twice; what is said in the second place about Alexander and Aristotle, is also found in M., II. 10, where it is ascribed to Galen.

⁵ T., I. 1, in P., 44, 41, instead is read, "an Indian King" (מלך הודו).

⁶ Special explanations are adduced in T. p. 3b to the words שבת יוראה, Eccles. ix. 11; T., I. 4, to זר יהיר לץ שמו, Prov. xxi. 24; T., IV. 4, to עצלה תפיל תרדמה, Prov. xix. 15; T., V. 1, to עם אלהי אברהם, Ps. xlvii. 10, and to שלח לחמך על פני המים, Eccles. xi. 1; T., V. 2, to מונע בר יקבהו לאם, Prov. xi. 26.

The work, *The Ennoblement of the Character* (תקון מדות), discusses both these subjects. They are, however, as the author himself admits, handled in a somewhat sketchy and brief manner,¹ so that a complete system of ethics cannot be constructed from this work. Even as it stands, it often needs explanation and amplification from the other writings of Ibn Gebirol, to which allusion has already been made. We shall, therefore, supplement our outline of his views on general ethics from the *Fountain of Life* (Mekor Chayim, Fons Vitæ) and the *Crown of the Kingdom* (Keter Malchut). For specific points in his "concrete ethics," however, a general reference must here be made to the corresponding passages in the *Choice of Pearls*, leaving it to the reader to compare our remarks with the special chapters² in this collection of proverbial utterances. The book is easily accessible in the admirable edition published in London, 1859, with an English translation and notes by the Rev. B. H. Ascher. To properly fill up the gaps in Gebirol's system, these disconnected sentences are, however, not available.

I.

In the province of general ethics, Ibn Gebirol discusses the following points:—

1. The purpose of the moral life, which he deduces from the nature of man. Man, he observes, is the final object of the visible world, distinguished alike by his

¹ Thus Abraham b. Chasdai in his introduction to his Hebrew translation of the "Balance" (מאזני צדק) of Ghasâli, says, with reference to Gebirol's work חבור יקר מאד..... אבל הולך בו על דרך הקצר ולא השלימו על הראוי לפי דעת רוב המשכילים. The author himself says (T., p. 8a, line 12 from the bottom), that the work cannot lay claim to grand pretensions. Nevertheless, just on account of its brevity and conciseness, it acquired a certain amount of popularity, as appears from the preface of Judah Ibn Tibbon to the Hebrew translation (ed. Lyck).

² There are altogether sixty-four headings to the chapters, that really lighten the task of reference. The heading to c. 13 reads incorrectly זריזות (vigorousness); as is seen by the proverbs it contains, it should be והירות (circumspection).

form, his activity, and his intellect. He has two divine gifts in common with the angels—speech and reason. Hence it is that the angels are employed in succouring the pious, as is shown¹ in the examples of the patriarchs,² of Daniel,³ and of the inhabitants of Jerusalem⁴ during the siege of the city by Sennacherib.

But apart from these common general attributes, men are by nature very different from each other. The influence of the stars, according to Ibn Gebirol, determines the quantity and quality of the innate talents of every man. Therefore personal effort must come to the aid of natural endowment, and by moral means must either compensate for what Nature has withheld, or raise us above the degree in which we have been already placed by the stars. “Ennoblement of the character” must be the aim of all good men, by the help of which sensual desires must be restricted to the indispensable minimum, and the blissful drawing nigh unto God be facilitated, by which immortality is assured to mankind.⁵ Accordingly, our author called his ethical system the “ennoblement of the character” (תקון המדות), as his purpose was to wean mankind from frivolous pursuits to a love of moral discipline, and to inspire the thoughtless multitude with a desire to become acquainted with the character of the sages and to duly understand their words.⁶ This striving after a moral improvement must, however, take place in the days of youth; afterwards the chance of success becomes exceedingly faint.

2. The basis and pre-supposition of all moral action—viz., the freedom of the will: this doctrine Ibn Gebirol assumes, and only touches upon the question quite casually, without subjecting it to a close discussion. Probably he took it for granted that his readers were well acquainted

¹ T., p. 1.—Ibn Gebirol also holds the view of Saadia, expressed in *Emunot* IV., the beginning, that man is the centre of the universe, a theory which was afterwards disputed: See my *Ethik des Maimonides*, p. 21, note 4.

² Gen. xviii. 2 *sqq.*; xlviii. 16; Hosea xii. 5.

³ Dan. vi. 23.

⁴ 2 Kings xix. 35.

⁵ T., p. 3b.

⁶ T., p. 8a.

with this doctrine from Saadiah's work on the philosophy of religion, which was utilised and expressly mentioned by him.¹ He merely remarks² that the passage *מִי מִצְעָדֵי גֹבַהּ*, "The steps of a man are ordered by the Lord, and he delighteth in his way" (Psalm xxxvii. 23), does not refer to moral compulsion, but, on the contrary, the meaning is that God created the soul perfect, without any defects,³ and that, if a man strives after virtue and noble conduct in life (*כוֹנֵנוּ*),⁴ he will find favour with God (*וּדְרָכֵי יִחְפֹּץ*).

3. Connected with this doctrine is the opinion that evil cannot be innate in mankind,⁵ but that the immortal and rational soul comes pure and undefiled from the hands of God, its maker, and that it is only the vegetable soul, the home of sensuous desires, which is the source of all evil.⁶

4. In his general ethics Ibn Gebirol's doctrines regarding virtue are confined to a definition of virtue and vice.

a. The idea of virtue he explains, according to ancient custom, by a formal definition. He speaks of it in various places as the *via media*, the mean between two extremes.⁷ He probably did not obtain this conception direct from its original source, the *Ethics* of Aristotle,⁸ as he neither always makes a consistent use of it, nor lays any stress upon the deductions that follow from it.⁹

b. Vice, Ibn Gebirol designates as "sickness of the

¹ Saadiah, *Emunot* IV.

² T., p. 7b.

³ Hence the text reads, *מִי מִצְעָדֵי גֹבַהּ* : through God (*i.e.*, through the gifts of God) are the steps of a man possible, only through them can he walk his way.

⁴ *I.e.*, if they, *viz.*, the steps of a man, are directed to virtue and right conduct in life.

⁵ As, *e.g.*, the Church Father Augustine and the Church have adopted the dogma of Original Sin.

⁶ T., p. 7a.

⁷ T., II. *מִבְּחַר הַדְּבָרִים אֲמֻצְעֵיהֶם* ; II. 15, *בְּכָל הָעֵינִינִים* ; IV. 1, twice ; V. 1, 2, 3.

⁸ *Vide my Ethics of Maimonides*, p. 79, note 6.

⁹ *Vide ib.*, upon Ibn Gebirol, p. 12 ; upon the Golden Mean in ethics, see p. 79 *sqq.*

soul," and avoidance of it as its "cure"—an idea that was more or less distinctly taught by the Scriptures,¹ Plato,² Aristotle,³ the Stoics,⁴ the Koran,⁵ and the later Jewish writers upon the philosophy of religion.⁶ That ethics was consequently the "cure of the soul," was not so fully pointed out by him as afterwards by Maimonides.⁷ But he does, however, in certain cases,⁸ counsel the purification of the soul from vice by running to the contrary extreme, although not so positively as Maimonides, imitating Aristotle and others, has done.⁹

5. The aim of the moral life or the *summum bonum*, Ibn Gebirol terms "felicity," corresponding to the *εὐδαιμονία* of Aristotle and others. The essence of this idea he explains both negatively and positively.

a. The negative aspect of felicity Ibn Gebirol touches upon very briefly, merely warning against "pleasure" (הנאות), being regarded, like virtue, as an end to be striven for in human conduct,¹⁰ or reckoned among the states of the rational soul. On the contrary, pleasure is the real source of many vices or diseases of the soul, which need a careful course of conduct for their healing.¹¹

b. In its positive sense, our author dwells upon true felicity in different passages of his *Fountain of Life*, which we shall here bring together.

The power of acquiring knowledge, he says,¹² takes fore-

¹ Hos. xiv. 5; Ps. xli. 5.

² *Gorgias*, p. 464 ed. Steph. and *Repub.* IV., p. 444 (cp. Guttman: *The Religious Philosophy of Abraham Ibn Daud*, p. 217, note 1; *The Religious Philosophy of Saadiah*, p. 282, note 1).

³ *Nicom. Ethics*, I. 13.

⁴ Cicero, *Tuscul.*, IV. 10, 23; 12, 27.

⁵ *Sura*, V. 57.

⁶ See my *Ethics of Maimonides*, p. 78, note 4.

⁷ *Ib.*, p. 77.

⁸ T., p. 4b, lines 9, 10; I. 4; III. 2, several times; III. 4; IV. 1.

⁹ Cp. my *Ethics of Maimonides*, p. 83, II. 1, and p. 84, note 2, where another contrast between Ibn Gebirol and Maimonides is drawn.

¹⁰ As, following the example of the ancient Greek school of Hedonists, the Cyrenaic and Epicurean, many later so-called philosophers taught.

¹¹ T., p. 4b, line 9 sqq.

¹² L., I. 1.

most rank among the powers of man. Hence it follows that the aim of his endeavours must be "knowledge," and above all the knowledge of his own being, for it is his own being or nature which comprehends and penetrates into the objective world, and enables him to bring external things within the reach of his powers.¹ But man must also continually strive to attain to the knowledge of the ultimate cause (העלה האחרונה), to whom he owes his existence, in order to secure felicity (ההצלחה).²

If knowledge is the first means, moral conduct is the second, whereby the human soul unites itself with the higher world, is purified from obscurity,³ and freed from the fetters of Nature.⁴ Ibn Gebirol uses words to the same effect in his grand poetical hymn, "The Crown of the Kingdom":—

Who thy secret learneth, eternal bliss attains;
Its joyous fruit partaking, life unending gains.

Or again:—

Thou, God, art the Light
That shall shine in the soul of the pure;
Now thou art hidden by sin, by sin with its cloud of night.
Now thou art hidden, but then, as over the height,
Then shall thy glory break through the clouds that obscure,
And be seen in the mount of the Lord.

And finally:—

Thou art the highest!
To gaze on thee longeth the eager soul,
In part thy glory seeing, but ne'er the whole.⁵

¹ Upon the Neo-Platonic character of these and the following doctrines: Cp. M. Joel's *Ibn Gebirol's Importance for the History of Philosophy*, Breslau, 1876, p. 10 *sqq.*; Guttman's *Die Philosophie des Salomo Ibn Gebirol*, Göttingen, 1889, p. 66 *sqq.*

² Other terms of equal importance are: "Continual Well-being" (הטובה התמידה, T., p. 3*b*, line 7); "The Greatest Repose and the Greatest Enjoyment" (המנוחה הגדולה והתענוג הגדול, L. III. 31).

³ The moral *kátharsis* of Plotinus, Joel, *ibid.*, p. 11. ⁴ L., I. 2; III. 37.

⁵ These passages occur in the sections beginning אתה אור, אתה אלהי, אתה עליון.

The general principles of moral conduct taught by Ibn Gebirol have now been set forth; as regards particulars, the account of the concrete section of his ethics will furnish some details upon the most important of them. It therefore now remains to indicate Ibn Gebirol's view of the method by which the human intelligence can be elevated to attain its highest goal.

According to Ibn Gebirol, through the process of reminiscence,¹ by the help of sense-perception and an activity of thought that gradually grows more spiritual, the soul is raised up once more to the full height of its intellectual condition before its earthly existence is assumed.² A spiritual world opens for mankind in the manifold sciences which are partly preparatory and partly perfected, *i.e.*, sciences proper.³ An irresistible yearning and love impel the intelligent soul continually onwards from step to step to the goal of a higher knowledge, to the knowledge of spiritual beings and of God himself,⁴ and these impulses increase in force the nearer the goal is approached.⁵ Every success achieved during this progress is accompanied by a sensation of pleasure. Above all, the knowledge of the spiritual beings (world-spirit, soul of the world, Nature, according to the Neo-Platonic phraseology) conduces to great satisfaction and delight.⁶ In the same measure as this knowledge is attained grows the power of the human mind to press forward to the knowledge of God and to direct contact with his spirit⁷ (הדבקות).

In its further advance beyond the highest of the (Neo-Platonic) spiritual beings, *i.e.*, beyond the Universal Intellect, the human mind, as Ibn Gebirol expresses it, comes to a standstill in front of closed gates. For pure form and pure matter, in their separate existence, are the higher

¹ This is taken from the *ἀνάμνησις* of the Platonic system.

² L., II. 11; cp. V. 65, 66.

³ החכמות המוסריות והתמות, T., p. 7b, at the bottom.

⁴ L., V. 46, 51.

⁵ V. 47, 52.

⁶ המנוחה הגדולה והתענוג הגדול.

⁷ L., III. 31.

presuppositions of that Universal Intellect which already contains within itself a combination of pure form and pure matter. To this point, however, no speculative thought, be it never so keen, is able to push its way.¹ In order to reach it, the human mind must be divested of all sensuality, must entirely free itself from the bonds of Nature, and completely neglect all impressions of sensuous perceptions and desires, like some polluting abomination. All certainly cannot succeed in this attempt, and even the few not at every time. The more thorough this rejection of all sensuality, the nearer does the soul approach to an immediate vision of the highest stages of the spiritual world. The final degree of this divesting oneself of all bodily impulses is a total forgetfulness and disregard of all sensuality, an ecstasy, which alone can bring about the immediate contemplation of that which is purely Spiritual and Divine.² He who has thus passed through the portals of the unknowable with a purified soul becomes himself a spiritual, God-like being, as immortal as the Deity, who now informs and fulfils his own spirit, and he delights in his immediate proximity to the absolute *summum bonum*, to the ever-existing Being. His hitherto restless yearning is satisfied, and his pleasure endures to eternity.³ The fruit of this striving is thus felicity and deliverance from death, and a union with the source of eternal life.⁴

Thus far speaks Ibn Gebirol. We see him here again completely in harmony with the Neo-Platonic philosophy. Plotinus also, in his theory of knowledge and in his ethics, had taught that beside the knowledge acquired through the activity of the understanding (*διάνοια, λογισμός*), there existed the possibility of direct contemplation, which is the prior condition of the understanding's activity—a contemplation which is reached by a process of thinking unimpeded and unimpaired by anything earthly and corporeal, and which, in its pure abstraction, is able to become

¹ L., V. 55.² L., III. 37.³ L., V. 55.⁴ וההצלחה [וההצלחה] מהמות L., V. 73.

conscious of, and partially to apprehend, the Divine Reason itself. Man, however, only attains the highest state, according to Plotinus and Philo of Alexandria, when, undisturbed even by this very consciousness and by every kind of thinking, in self-forgetful rapture (ἔκστασις) and simplicity (ἁπλως), he is suddenly illumined by the light of the Godhead, and becomes so immediately united with it that all difference between him and the Deity vanishes.

II.

But how must the life of an individual be ordered so as to render such a soaring upwards towards the Deity possible to him? An answer to this question is to be found in the "concrete" ethics of our author.

1. Ibn Gebirol attempts to gain a purview over the whole field of concrete ethics in the following manner. Man, as is also mentioned in other passages,¹ is a "little world" (עולם קטן, μικρὸς κόσμος, a microcosm), corresponding to the universe or "the great world." (עולם גדול, macrocosm). In a similar way, the four elements in the visible world correspond to four essential component parts of the human body, which is endowed with noble stature and excellent organs. These four parts are the blood, the spittle, the black gall and the yellow gall.² Man has besides five senses, which, as a moral being, he ought only to employ in such a way that they may prove useful and serviceable.

Ibn Gebirol here dwells upon the separate senses, and propounds some weighty doctrines of concrete ethics, by treating of the senses in the order of their importance, and drawing up rules of morality which define how to make use of them.⁴

¹ L., III. 6, 44.

² Cp. Dieterici, *Anthropologie der Araber im zehnten Jahrhundert* Leipzig, 1871, p. 4, 42, 189.

³ T., p. 3b, in the middle. The attempt of Ibn Gebirol to discover the five senses in Eccles. ix. 11, must be considered a failure. ⁴ T., p. 4a, b

He next attempts to group together the virtues and their corresponding vices, and he combines with them the good and evil fortunes of life. The virtues and vices are treated in connection with the five senses, and in this wise ethics becomes largely the doctrine of virtue. To every sense two pairs of virtues and vices are ascribed, so that, altogether, there have to be discussed twenty terms, in five groups of four each, corresponding to the four elements.

Ibn Gebirol thus enumerates them:—

To the sense of Sight—	Pride and Humility, Shame and Impudence.
” ” ”	Hearing—Hate and Love, Mercy and Cruelty.
” ” ”	Smell—Anger and Benevolence, Envy and Diligence.
” ” ”	Taste—Joy and Sorrow, Repentance and Composure of Mind. ¹
” ” ”	Touch—Liberality and Parsimony, Bravery and Cowardice. ²

In this way Ibn Gebirol constructs, so to speak, the framework for the treatment of the special portions of his ethical doctrines. A glance, however, over the above list will at once show that Ibn Gebirol has made a selection from among the virtues and vices, and has not by any means given a complete classification of them. Some important virtues are missing, as, *e.g.*, three of the four Platonic cardinal virtues, viz., Temperance, Wisdom, and Justice. He also does not try to explain the derivation of the virtues from one fundamental idea naturally dividing itself into many branches. Their relegation under the five senses is external and fortuitous, and is not effected without some straining and artificiality, with the exception of certain instances which may have misled the author to a

¹ Joy and Sorrow, Repentance and Tranquillity are not virtues, but conditions of the mind, which though of a moral nature ought rather to be regarded as good and evil circumstances, than as virtues and their opposites.

² T., Introduction, p. 8*b*.

false generalisation of his method. Indeed, he himself is aware that his classification will meet with contradiction, but he thinks this will be due to the brevity of its justification and to the lack of proofs from logic and from Scripture, which his bodily and mental sufferings prevented him from adducing.¹

In explanation and excuse of his work that was thus undertaken under such unfavourable circumstances, Ibn Gebirol informs us that his friends had prayed him to compose this ethical work in memory of days that had been spent together, and at the same time had induced him to link the virtues and vices to the five senses. He explains that he expects attacks from unfriendly critics, but will not on that account relinquish his work, but rather appeals to the judgment of impartial readers.² Notwithstanding this, the attempt of Ibn Gebirol to find in the words of Ps. xxxvii. an exhortation to moral improvement in particular relation to his tabulated twenty virtues and vices,³ although occasionally ingenious and clever, must on the whole be considered a failure.

2. In the subsequent description of the virtues and vices, the goods and evils of life, lies the main attraction which this little work has exercised upon many readers. His method presents the following noteworthy features, to which attention will now be drawn, and which will suffice to convey to the reader a fair idea of the concrete ethics of Ibn Gebirol.

a. The arbitrariness of his classification becomes less objectionable, because under each of the principal virtues and vices already enumerated above, he treats of a series of others that are related to them. Thus, *e.g.*, in I. 1, under the head of "Pride," haughtiness, arrogance, and ambition are dwelt upon. In I. 2, together with shame, modesty and prudence—so that here the Platonic *φρόνησις* comes at least partially to its rights—are touched upon; in II. 2, incon-

¹ T., p. 5a, at the top.

² T., p. 5b, 6a.

³ T., p. 7a, b.

stancy, falsehood, and hypocrisy come under the head of "Hate." In this way the outcome of the plan becomes more thorough than is expected from the original design.

b. This enlargement of his material is also partly caused by a certain inaccuracy. For Ibn Gebirol occasionally could not find the exact name of a certain virtue or its opposite, and felt himself compelled to select some expression of a similar meaning, which, however, also possessed other cognate significations. This circumstance was utilised by Ibn Gebirol to treat at the same time of those other chance cognate significations; *e.g.*, in IV. 2, the word רצון is taken in the four senses: satisfaction, pleasure, benevolence, and favour, which are supported by verses from the Bible; in IV. 3, קנאה is treated as meaning both envy and zeal.

c. The antagonistic views upon ethical questions are not passed over in silence. He mentions, for instance, the advocates of pride, and attacks their position,¹ as Saadiah had already done before him.²

d. Ibn Gebirol is particularly rich in proofs of how virtues and vices sometimes, through special circumstances, are suddenly changed into their opposites. He points out, for example, that the honest pride of the religious and virtuous man, as opposed to the arrogance arising from low motives and impulses, is only worthy of praise,³ just as humility would then be objectionable when, through its retention, the wicked man would gain the superiority over the good⁴; similarly the feeling of shame or bashfulness is to be rebuked when it is necessary to give utterance to the truth, to exhort to goodness, to give instruction in virtue and piety⁵; and, in such cases, a course of conduct that would under other circumstances be deemed too impertinent, or too bold and impudent, becomes deserving of praise.⁶ It is further self-evident that all

¹ T., I. 1.² *Emunot* X. 3, 9, p. 93, ed. Berlin.³ T., I. 1.⁴ T., I. 2.⁵ T., I. 3.⁶ T., I. 4.

according to the objects of its attention, love may be either praiseworthy or the reverse,¹ whereas cruelty can never under any conditions be justified.² Joy is of two kinds. There is the natural (outward) sort that accompanies the gratification and fulfilment of a wish ; its result is laughter. Spiritual joy, however, is the possession only of those pure and noble angelic souls who are happy in their piety and self-restraint. Anger, which in itself is objectionable, when directed both by word and deed against sinners, becomes righteous indignation, and as such is commendable.³ Just as bravery is so fit a subject of praise, and is glorified in song, when exercised in the service of that which is right and good, its excess or its erroneous use, namely, foolhardiness, merits disapproval.⁴

e. With special ardour and detail, Ibn Gebirol turns to speak of those sufferings of the soul that appear to have oppressed his own heart most, viz., grief or care (דאגה). As he distinctly observes, he is well qualified and anxious to offer counsel and aid to those who suffer from them. As the best remedy, he recommends the withdrawal from all desire of temporal good, which is the cause of care, and the application of the mind to the treasures of science and religion. His advice is: rather renunciation than care.⁵

f. All these ethical teachings are enlivened and rendered more distinct by the numerous examples from the lives of Biblical and historical personages, as well as a number of Scriptural and philosophical testimonies and sayings that are adduced in their support. In the course of this procedure several verses in the Bible are specially discussed, as has already been mentioned. The phrase (Prov. xix. 15), עֲצִלָּה תִפֹּל תִרְדָּמָה, "Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep," is even explained physiologically, according to the views then accepted, in the following manner: the vapours which, through the activity of industrious work, issue from the pores of the skin, in the case of a man who leads an idle,

¹ T., II. 1.² T., II. 4.³ T., IV. 1.⁴ T., V. 3.⁵ T., III. 2.

dull existence, mount to his head and make him sleepy.¹ When, however, a suitable passage in the Bible cannot be found for some phase of moral action that is under discussion, as, *e.g.*, in v. 4, with reference to cowardice, the author contrives to bring in some passage about a cognate virtue or vice, although it has already been considered, as in the example just quoted, where a passage about idleness has to serve instead of one on cowardice, although idleness had already in IV. 4 been treated of as the opposite of industry.

g. The prominent mention of special illnesses, such as stiffness or swelling of the hip, gout, and diseases of the liver,² shows that Ibn Gebirol, like most cultured scholars at the Mohammedan academies, had also studied medicine, perhaps even had practised it as a profession.

h. We will now quote certain expressions and examples in his works that deserve special notice. Ibn Gebirol stigmatises parsimony³ as one of the worst qualities, necessarily leading to the disgraceful vice of covetousness. We ought not even to be niggardly with our knowledge,⁴ seeing that the possession of it in no way becomes lessened by imparting it to others, as little as the flame loses anything by kindling a lamp.⁵ A man should accustom himself, says Ibn Gebirol, to gradually break himself off from miserly ways, first, by showing liberality towards his relatives, then towards persons further removed, until liberality to all finally takes the place of niggardliness.

The non-Biblical instances employed by our author are mostly taken from Arab writers.

As an example of simplicity of manners, which in no way prejudices the dignity of a person of distinguished station, Ibn Gebirol cites a ruler, the Caliph Omar. When, one

¹ T., IV. 1.

² T., V. 4.

³ T., IV. 2.

⁴ M., II. 2, gives the doctrines in the name of Plato, it thus reads
לִכְן אֵל תְּהִי בִילִי בְּמֵה שְׂתַרְעַ

⁵ This is also briefly spoken of in the same place in the name of Plato.
Cp. also Sifre to Numb. xi. 17.

evening, this monarch was in the presence of a large company, he himself rose and snuffed the charred wick of the lighted lamp. On being asked why he did not leave the task to his attendants, he replied, with noble pride, "I was a king when I rose from my seat, and as a king have I resumed it."¹

In the chapter that speaks of sorrow and care,² Ibn Gebirol narrates one of those legends about Alexander that were so current and popular among the Mohammedans, and which, with certain alterations, also re-appear in the later Jewish folk-lore.

When he felt that his end was nigh, Alexander the Great wrote to his mother, in order to comfort her, the following letter. "Dear mother! As soon as you hear of my death, cause a large and strong city to be erected, fill it with food and drink, and invite for a certain day people from all countries. When everything is prepared, and the whole world is about to come to the banquet that you have arranged, issue a public order that no one to whom a misfortune has ever happened, or who has experienced sorrow, may approach your feast." When, after the death of Alexander, this letter reached the queen-mother, she did all that her son had requested her. After sending out the general invitation to the feast, she promulgated the decree that no one should enter her palace who had ever suffered pain. The result was that not a single person put in an appearance. She then understood that her son had only desired to console her for his untimely death, by reminding her that misfortune and sorrow were the common lot and fate of all mankind.

King Ardshir, Ibn Gebirol relates in another place,³ gave to a member of his suite a written slip of paper with the command to hand it to him whenever he saw him in a rage. Upon it was written, "Hold! For you are not a God, but only a body whose parts will become sundered from each other, and in a very short time turn to worms and dust!"

¹ T., I. 2.² T., III. 2.³ T., I. 1.

As an example of magnanimous forgiveness, Ibn Gebirol tells the following:—A king, in anger, sentenced a number of conspirators to death. When they were about to be executed, one of them turned to the king and said, "If we have acted wickedly to become traitors, do thou, O king, a good action and pardon us!" And he forgave them, and they were spared.¹

i. In conclusion we will quote some of the non-Biblical sayings scattered through the various chapters.

Evil conduct is akin to pride.² Aristotle says, Just as beauty of form distinguishes the body, so the excellence of the character distinguishes the soul.³ Every virtue is envied by someone, except the virtue of humility.⁴ To be beloved and at rest are the fruits of humility.⁵ He who follows his desires comes to harm; he who resists them grows strong.⁶ Plato taught concerning revenge: he who really wishes to avenge himself upon his enemies, let him distinguish himself by becoming more and more virtuous.⁷ Once the friends of the god-like Socrates asked him, "How is it that we have never seen you in grief?" He answered, "Because I have never acquired anything that I could not do without, or about which I could grieve."⁸—If you are angry, forgive. For to renounce revenge is no sign of weakness.⁹ He who is benevolent is rich; he who obeys has rest; he who relies upon himself will become isolated.¹⁰ Show goodness to him to whom it is due, as well as to him to whom it is not due. For if it is due, then it is being shown in the right place; and if it is not due, then it is becoming in *thee* to show it.¹¹

Enough, we trust, has been said to point out the proper place of Solomon Ibn Gebirol in the history of ethics, and to show clearly that this famous poet and thinker, in his short ethical work, on which, moreover, he was not able to bring to bear the full strength of his intellectual powers, as

¹ T., IV. 2.² T., I. 1.³ *Ibid.*⁴ T., I. 2.⁵ *Ibid.*⁶ T., II. 1.⁷ T., II. 4.⁸ T., III. 2.⁹ T., IV. 1.¹⁰ T., IV. 2.¹¹ T., V. 1.

he himself deplored, yet took up a definite point of view, and has incidentally left us a number of beautiful and valuable doctrines in a suitable and attractive form. If any readers should feel inclined through the observations in this paper to become acquainted by their own reading with all the details of Ibn Gebirol's ethics, this would be a further and most desirable result of the present sketch. Best of all would it be if this study of Ibn Gebirol's ethical treatise should lead to the issue of its Arabic original, the MS. of which, in Oxford, under the title of *כְּרֵאֵב אֶצְלָאָה וְיִלְחֻלָּאָה*¹ still awaits publication. Several passages in our editions of the *Tikkun middot hannefesh* could probably be corrected and rendered more intelligible through it, and the Arabic verses which the Hebrew translator has omitted, and which are cited in various chapters of the original as additional proofs of the subject to be discussed, may not come as an unwelcome new gift to the friends of Arabic poetry.

D. ROSIN.

¹ Catal. *Uri*, p. 66, No. 358 (Munk, *Mélanges*, p. 168, note).
